

## **Modernism, Exclusivity, and the Sophisticated Public of *Harper's Bazaar* (UK)**

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### **Abstract:**

This article explores the reciprocal relationship between modernism and *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) during 1929-35. In its early years this commercial fashion magazine exploited modernism's perceived exclusivity and highbrow status to flatteringly construct its aspirational readers as culturally sophisticated. Whether printing modernist texts or artworks or parodying their experimental style, early *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) promoted the reception of modernist writers and artists as high cultural celebrities, whose presence in the magazine enhanced its cultural value. While insisting on the exclusivity of modernist art and literature, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) simultaneously facilitated the mainstreaming of modernism by commodifying modernist texts and artworks and teaching its readers how to approach them. During the early 1930s, this article argues, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) helped to establish early narratives of modernism's origins and development while marketing modernism as a desirable, high-end cultural product to its fashion-conscious audience.

**Keywords:** fashion; celebrity; middlebrow; Gertrude Stein; women's magazines

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Two decades of revisionist scholarship have transformed perceptions of modernism and its publics, as Laura Frost observes, leaving us with 'a more effervescent [modernism] that writes for *Vogue*, courts celebrity, and adores Chaplin films', within which 'even high

modernism can look downright user-friendly'.<sup>1</sup> This shift in critical narratives, while very welcome, threatens to create myths of its own. Modernism's presence in commercial periodicals such as Condé Nast's *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* has become a familiar signifier of the mainstreaming of modernist culture, though the scholars whose research valuably exposed this presence have also noted that these magazines addressed 'upper-class' or 'minority' readerships.<sup>2</sup> Frost cautions, too, that 'at the same time that scholars produce a more vernacular, culturally savvy, and accessible field, modernism's own overt rhetoric [...] upholds the great divide'.<sup>3</sup> She argues that modernists maintained a binary between highbrow and lowbrow by elevating the difficult pleasures of avant-garde writing above the easily-consumable pleasures of mass culture.<sup>4</sup> It was also the 'perceived "restricted" appeal of modernism', as Aurelea Mahood has commented in relation to British *Vogue*, that 'became the very means by which it entered the literary and cultural mainstream'.<sup>5</sup> This article examines the treatment of modernism in another commercial magazine, the British edition of *Harper's Bazaar* during 1929-35, and demonstrates how this fashion periodical likewise exploited modernism's perceived exclusivity and high cultural value to flatteringly construct its readers as culturally sophisticated. From the vantage point of the 1930s, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) looked back on modernism's rise and helped to assure the status of prominent modernists as highbrow celebrities by encouraging their reception as established rather than counter-cultural figures. Whether promoting or satirising modernist writers, artists and their works, the magazine actively participated in shaping modernism's public profile in the later interwar period.

Launched by William Randolph Hearst's National Magazine Company in 1929, the British edition of *Harper's Bazaar* printed fashion news from Paris and London, photographic reports of high society and celebrity gatherings, essays and reviews of new books, exhibitions, and theatre, travel features, and fiction and articles by well-known

authors. The magazine addressed a wealthy leisured readership, or middle-class readers coveting such a lifestyle, for whom knowledge of modernist art and literature was a valuable indicator of sophistication. In *Sophistication: A Literary and Cultural History*, Faye Hammill identifies a chief characteristic of this highly malleable and often purposefully mystified concept as the assumption that sophistication ‘can only be recognised by someone who already possesses it’, and yet, she notes, ‘at the same time, and paradoxically, such a person would usually be imagined as educated, culturally aware, fashionable and self-conscious, and all of these things require deliberate effort’. For Hammill, ‘smart’ magazines such as *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* supply ‘prime examples’ of texts that make this tension visible by ‘propos[ing] that sophistication is the property of a distinguished elite, and yet covertly offer[ing] an education in sophistication’.<sup>6</sup> Early *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) can be profitably interpreted in this mould. This glossy fashion periodical strove to attract and cultivate a sophisticated audience by providing exclusive access to designer fashions, the aristocracy, high art, and celebrity culture, all of which readers might encounter through purchasing the magazine in its first decade of publication. Its monthly issues, priced high at two shillings, assumed and increased the reader’s cultural capital by supplying writing by highbrow authors, including those associated with experimentalism, and overt commentary on modernist art and literature. During 1929-35, *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) offered readers an education in sophistication, within which modernism remained an important marker of advanced cultural knowledge.

Scholarly accounts of modernism’s presence in *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* have rightly emphasised its modernity. Modernism provided a fertile source of content for periodicals engaged in selling novelty – or the illusion of it – whether in relation to dress, design, or cultural trends. ‘*Vanity Fair* – like modernism itself – continually marketed itself in terms of novelty and making new’, Hammill has noted.<sup>7</sup> Jane Garrity similarly identifies ‘*Vogue*’s

strategy of “marketing modernity”, which was modelled on Frank Crowninshield’s *Vanity Fair* during Dorothy Todd’s mid-1920s editorship of British *Vogue*.<sup>8</sup> *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) was likewise preoccupied with the new and thus prized modernism’s association with avant-gardism. However, while British *Vogue* of the 1920s positioned modernism firmly in the present, British *Harper’s Bazaar* in the 1930s as often surveyed modernism retrospectively. From this alternative standpoint the magazine recalled and narrated modernism’s origins and development, and facilitated the canonization of modernist works and the creation of modernist celebrities. Critical discussions of modernism and celebrity frequently focus on the ways in which, to evoke Aaron Jaffe’s seminal study, prominent modernists ‘were more canny about fashioning their careers [...] than is often appreciated’.<sup>9</sup> This article directs attention instead to *Harper’s Bazaar*’s canny fashioning of modernism and its practitioners. Reciprocal relationships flourished between modernism and fashion and smart magazines. Nicola Luckhurst’s early work on British *Vogue* focused on that magazine as a ‘valuable promotional space’ for Bloomsbury, but also noted it was ‘making the highbrow chic’.<sup>10</sup> Garrity has traced a more symbiotic relationship between the two, positing that while Bloomsbury ‘wage[d] a successful self-promotional campaign in *Vogue*’, the magazine recognised ‘that the Group was a marketable commodity’ and ‘exploited Bloomsbury’s intellectual, upper-class position’.<sup>11</sup> Hammill has observed that the exposure given to modernist artists and writers in sophisticated, medium-circulation magazines like *Vanity Fair* was part of a two-way exchange: ‘the modernists’ growing cultural capital consolidated the smart magazines’ reputations as taste-makers, and allowed them to participate extensively in the making of modernist reputations’.<sup>12</sup> This article builds on this valuable work to consider the push and pull between modernism and *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) during 1929-35 with attention to this magazine’s role in shaping modernist reputations. It reveals that modernism’s

fashionable status within *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) in its early years was dependent on its exclusivity as much as its modernity.

Targeting a highly educated and affluent audience, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) cannot be described as a mass-market publication. Circulation reached an estimated 35-40,000 by 1938; in comparison, *Good Housekeeping* (UK), the National Magazine Company's domestic women's monthly, had a circulation of 123,000 by 1938, while the highly successful 'service' weeklies *Woman* and *Woman's Own* commanded circulations of 750,000 and 357,000 respectively.<sup>13</sup> The notion of the middlebrow is useful for analysing aspects of *Harper's Bazaar* and its audience, chiefly the magazine's sophisticated posturing and the expectation that its readers aspired to cultural competence without fully identifying with highbrow culture.<sup>14</sup> However, the magazine's outlook is also shaped by other discourses and the publics they address. Its aspirational stance, for example, can be interpreted in relation to Marjorie Ferguson's recognition of a cult of femininity that pervades commercial women's magazines and assumes the female reader can always 'do it better', whether dressing for the season, managing a household, or keeping up-to-date with the arts.<sup>15</sup> *Harper's Bazaar's* attention to modernism can be understood, too, through the elitist logic of fashion. Writing in 1904, Georg Simmel identified fashion itself as 'a product of class distinction'.<sup>16</sup> Whether in relation to dress, behaviour, or aesthetic judgement, Simmel contended, fashion 'affects only the upper classes', who set the trends that unite and distinguish their social group:

Just as soon as the lower classes begin to copy their style, thereby crossing the line of demarcation the upper classes have drawn and destroying the uniformity of their coherence, the upper classes turn away from this style and adopt a new one, which in its turn differentiates them from the masses; and thus the game goes merrily on.<sup>17</sup>

For Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, taste is also a product and producer of class hierarchies.

'It functions as a sort of social orientation, a "sense of one's place"', Bourdieu claims,

‘guiding the occupants of a given place in social space [...] towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position’.<sup>18</sup> *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK), in common with other sophisticated fashion and smart magazines of the period, sought to guide its readers to good taste whether in relation to dress, design, etiquette, or the arts. It appealed to and created readers who were able – or who desired – to talk knowledgeably on all aspects of high culture, and, as the following analysis demonstrates, participated in fashioning modernism into a desirable, high-end cultural product. Despite facilitating the mainstreaming of modernism in the early 1930s, *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) nevertheless insisted on the exclusivity of modernist literature and art in order to cultivate and flatter its aspirational readership.

### **Harper’s Bazaar (UK): Early Aims and Content**

Though founded as a fashion magazine, early *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) harboured literary aspirations. Its origins were in a women’s weekly magazine first issued by the Harper brothers in New York in 1867 and purchased by Hearst in 1913. In a bid to rival *Vogue*, Hearst transformed the magazine into ‘a thick, glossy, chic, lavishly illustrated monthly devoted to fashions, beauty, fiction, and belles-lettres’.<sup>19</sup> The British edition was launched in October 1929 and edited autonomously from London, though the magazine shared cover art with its older American sibling throughout the 1930s. P. Joyce Reynolds was general editor from 1929-45, with Alan Y. McPeake as art and fiction editor.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of fiction significantly distinguished *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) from its chief competitor, which did not routinely print fiction even during the Todd years. While rivalling *Vogue*, the British edition of *Harper’s Bazaar* emulated the expansive cultural sophistication of American smart magazines, with which J. B. Priestley implicitly aligned the magazine even as he rejected the comparison in a signed, celebrity endorsement from October 1930:

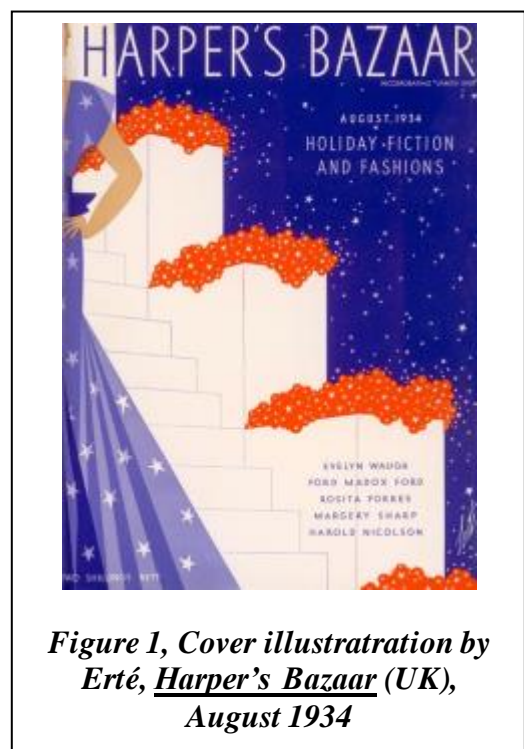
“Harper’s Bazaar” is at once so very feminine, dashing and bang-up-to-the-minute that it terrifies me. Nevertheless, I notice with pleasure that it seems to be breaking with what is – to me – the dreary tradition of the “smart” magazine. Thus, it has brought in, as regular contributors, such writers as Ivor Brown and Frank Swinnerton, men of very solid merit, and it looks like offering a fine pasture for some of the younger writers.<sup>21</sup>

Priestley’s statement positions *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) as simultaneously ‘feminine’ in its sensitivity to fashion and cultural trends and implicitly masculine in its attention to high culture. By printing serious writers – Priestley’s ‘men of very solid merit’ – the magazine sought to appeal to, and create, an educated, cultured, female public. Indirect comparison with the smart magazines was furthered by a tagline printed under the magazine’s title on front covers of early issues, ‘INCORPORATING “VANITY FAIR”’, which evoked another periodical owned by the National Magazine Company that ceased publication in 1929, but the association with Nast’s *Vanity Fair* can hardly have been unwelcome.<sup>22</sup>

During 1929-35, the content of each monthly issue was organised under the headings Fiction, Paris and London Fashions, and Society and Special Features. Fashion pages were generously illustrated with some images in glorious colour—still a rarity for the period. Society photo-spreads and gossip columns recorded people and fashions seen at social events of the leisured upper classes, including ‘Portraits of 1931 Debutantes’ (May 1931) and ‘Snapshots from Chantilly and Ascot’ (July 1933). Special Features included literary, art, and theatre criticism, features on interior design, and an array of opinion pieces and light articles by high-profile writers such as Ivor Brown’s defence of talking pictures in ‘Yes, I like the Talkies’ (January 1930), Edith Sitwell’s gossipy account of ‘Musical Parties I Have Really Enjoyed’ (November 1932), and Harold Nicolson’s spirited discussion, ‘Are the English Hypocrites?’ (February 1935). Fiction was contributed by popular and highbrow authors such as E. M. Delafield, W. Somerset Maugham, Nancy Mitford, Harold Nicolson, Dorothy

Parker, Vita Sackville-West, and Evelyn Waugh. Poems appeared from Richard Aldington, Viola Meynell, Osbert Sitwell, and Siegfried Sassoon among others. Celebrity artists and art critics reviewed exhibitions of classical and modern works. In March 1930, for example, R. H. Wilenski introduced readers to ‘modern sculptural experiments’ by Barbara Hepworth, Eric Kennington, Alan Durst, and Maurice Lambert, which ‘are rarely seen by the general public that does not frequent the one-man shows’.<sup>23</sup> This telling comment positions *Harper’s Bazaar*’s readers as likely part of that ‘general public’, but desiring entry into – and knowledge of – the smaller exhibitions frequented by an elite community of artists and art-lovers. By meeting and fuelling such highbrow cultural aspirations, the magazine sought to attract and retain its audience.

*Harper’s Bazaar*’s bright, bold cover designs also conveyed cultural value, with sharp lines, angular forms, and flat blocks of colour signalling its contact with modern trends in art. The magazine’s covers were often illustrated by Erté or Léon Bénigni during 1929-35 and normally depicted a stylised female face or figure engaged in a leisure activity associated with the upper classes (such as sailing or skiing) or against a seasonal background. In Erté’s August 1934 cover (fig. 1), for example, a woman in evening dress appears on the far left-hand side of the composition poised to ascend the bright white steps that dominate the image. Only a sliver of her face is visible in profile in the top-left corner. Her blue dress with white stars matches the deep blue night sky backdrop, while her flared skirt parallels the gradient of the steps. The reader’s gaze is directed past the figure to the magazine’s title and down to



**Figure 1, Cover illustration by Erté, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK), August 1934**



the list of celebrity contributors advertised in the bottom right-hand corner. Erté's design conveys glamour, glitz, and exclusivity. Hammill notes in her contribution to this issue that advertisements for *Vanity Fair* often framed that magazine as a fashionable dinner party with celebrities as potential guests.<sup>24</sup> This cover likewise suggests an interpretation of *Harper's Bazaar* as an elite social and cultural event, which the reader is invited to enter, alongside the chic figure depicted, simply by turning the page.

### **Cultivating Sophistication, Marketing Modernism**

Inside its covers, early *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) drew its readers into a sophisticated public, within which modernism was a valuable signifier of modishness and cultural capital. By including art and literature in its pages alongside features on fashion, etiquette, and upper-middle-class leisure activities, the magazine framed sophistication as a matter of cultural knowledge as much as wealth or style. Its editors assumed and expanded the reader's cultural awareness by commissioning fiction from leading authors, printing articles debating and parodying their works, and by sprinkling its fashion and society pages as a whole with fleeting references to high culture. Whether promoted or satirised, contemporary writers and artists were approached as celebrities. Surveying modernism from the early 1930s, *Harper's Bazaar* exploited the fame – or, in many cases, the notoriety – of modernist writers and artists and consolidated their high cultural status. The magazine provided a valuable outlet for high modernists keen to maintain their reputation or expand their audience, but was not simply a passive container for modernist content. Instead, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) capitalised on and fostered the celebrity of modernist writers to support its editorial aims. By marketing modernism as a highbrow cultural commodity, the magazine increased its own cultural capital and, by extension, the cultural competence and sophistication of its readers.

Early *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) framed its readers as subjects of an elite culture, regardless of their socio-economic background, by offering them access to designer fashions, aristocracy, the arts, and celebrity and by addressing them as informed observers of and participants in this lifestyle. This process of interpellation, to evoke Louis Althusser's conception of ideology's recruitment of subjects, was facilitated by casual allusions to high art and literature scattered across the magazine's content.<sup>25</sup> A summary of the next season's trends in accessories from November 1930, for example, punningly incorporated the title of a Shakespearean comedy and Iago's 'trifles, light as air' from Act 3, Scene 3 of *Othello* into its final fanciful claim that: 'These, Madame, are the trifles, light as air, which tell you a new season is with you, with the rhythm and the joy of much ado about nothings'.<sup>26</sup> 'With Miss. Gertrude Stein's permission', Nika Dittman declared in the opening of a report on Italian culture from December 1934, 'in Italy a woman is a woman is a woman and a man is a man is a man'.<sup>27</sup> These vacuous allusions to Shakespeare and Stein demonstrate Bourdieu's 'strategies of bluff', through which the accomplished socialite uses 'the vague knowledge given by familiarity' to give an inflated impression of their cultural competence.<sup>28</sup> By encouraging familiarity with high culture, these allusions enable the reader to better perform such bluffs themselves. Central to many conceptions of sophistication, as Hammill has traced, is the notion that this quality 'cannot be taught or learned'.<sup>29</sup> Such allusions assume and enhance the reader's cultural competence without the appearance of effort on either side. Crucially, they allow readers to recognise themselves as effortlessly sophisticated. These allusions function in the manner of Althusser's hail, his analogy for the mechanisms of interpellation whereby an individual hearing 'Hey, you there!' in the street turns and identifies himself as subject.<sup>30</sup> If the female reader is familiar with the allusion to *Othello* in the above account of the new season's accessories, this recognition allies her with the 'Madame' to whom it is addressed. This act of recognition might be interpreted in the same

way as Althusser's act of turning as indicative of the reader/individual's participation in their framing as subject. Through such strategies, in common with other fashion magazines of the period, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) interpellated its readers into an elite community united by shared cultural knowledge—or, rather, the illusion of cultural knowledge. Its audience's frame of reference was expected and expanded to include familiarity with a wide range of high cultural works, from canonical literature to Stein's modernist writing.

Unlike the 'little magazines' that facilitated modernism's rise, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) did not offer extensive coverage of experimental art and literature. Nevertheless, in its first decade, and particularly during 1929-35, the magazine exploited and cultivated the celebrity of modernist writers and artists by printing examples of their fiction, articles, and artwork, even if it did not always engage attentively with their contributions. In January 1930, for example, the magazine printed Virginia Woolf's short fiction, 'In the Looking Glass', which had first been published in Hearst's *Harper's Magazine* in December 1929.<sup>31</sup> The story depicts a wealthy, unmarried woman 'of fifty-five or sixty' named Isabella Tyson, whose true nature is revealed one 'summer afternoon' as she stands in front of a looking glass in the hallway of her quiet, country house. The unnamed narrator looks first to facts and then to imagination to establish 'the truth about Isabella', acknowledging 'how very little, after all these years, one knew about her', but only gains partial insight into Isabella's thoughts, hidden behind 'the mask-like indifference of her face', in the text's final stages.<sup>32</sup> The editorial billing of the story in *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) emphasises this modernist prioritisation of psychology over plot, but demonstrates only the loosest awareness of its content. The contents page subtitles it, 'A Phantasy of Fugitive Dreams', while a header above the text asks: 'Am I dreaming thoughts or thinking dreams?'<sup>33</sup> These mystifying captions evoke the text's lyrical prose and the narrator's extended interior monologue, stylistic features widely associated with Woolf's experimental fiction at this point in her career after the publication of

*Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *Orlando* (1928). A large illustration by Cecil Beaton represents Isabella Tyson standing in front of the looking glass as she does in the text, elegantly dressed and carrying a basket of flowers cut from her garden. Supported by the captions, and with the addition of a stack of books, a pair of reading glasses, and a small figurine of a female nude to the hallway table described in Woolf's story, Beaton's image also notably conjures up Woolf's contemporary reputation as a glamorous but elusive upper-class aesthete, crowned 'Queen of the High-brows' by Arnold Bennett in the *Evening Standard* on 28 November 1929.<sup>34</sup> These paratextual elements interestingly give no indication of the text's climactic epiphany, which, when read in this publication context, delivers an oblique criticism of the leisured, fashionable lifestyle idealised by *Harper's Bazaar* and its readers. Standing before the mirror at the story's close, Isabella is revealed by a 'pitiless light' to be 'perfectly empty', with 'no thoughts', 'no friends', and, when stripped of the illusion created by her expensive possessions and 'exquisite' clothes, as 'old and angular and veined and lined'.<sup>35</sup> However, the editorial framing of Woolf's story in this early issue of *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) entirely sidesteps this potential clash with the magazine's outlook. As Woolf unmasks Isabella and the lifestyle she represents, the magazine conversely seems to dress up Woolf as Isabella through its editorial billing and Beaton's illustration in order to emphasise her status as a highbrow celebrity. The story is packaged and sold to readers as a high-cultural commodity that delivers a taste of modernist experimentalism. It is to be consumed if not read attentively and through this contact with Woolf's fiction the magazine's audience is paradoxically offered an opportunity to demonstrate and cultivate the same superficial cultural sophistication that Woolf critiques.

Elsewhere, early issues of *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) supplied overt instruction on modernist aesthetics as part of the magazine's broader aim to create a public of discerning and culturally sophisticated readers. During 1930-31, C. R. W. Nevinson supplied a series of

five articles ‘on the world’s greatest personalities in present-day art’. The editorial caption above his first essay emphasises Nevinson’s ‘unique authority’ as ‘a famous painter [...] concerned in the start of many modern movements’, who ‘has met in person nearly all the artists he mentions’.<sup>36</sup> His articles blend art criticism with memoir to offer commentary on the major European schools in modernist painting, including vorticism, futurism, fauvism, surrealism, and expressionism, alongside personal anecdotes of famous modernist artists. They provide an accessible account of the evolution of modernist movements in different national contexts. In ‘Outstanding Artists in France To-day’ (September 1930), for example, Nevinson explains that ‘all modern art has its roots in Paris’, with reference to the French Impressionists, their influence on the Post-Impressionists and Cubists, and the role of Paris’s art dealers in creating a productive climate for modern art in France.<sup>37</sup> As well as tracing the origins and development of major contemporary movements, Nevinson introduces the reader to the most important artists associated with each school. ‘Outstanding Artists in Spain To-day’ (November 1930) positions cubism as a development from the work of Cézanne before detailing the stages of Picasso’s career to date, with reference to his ‘blue period’ and the importance of ‘Gertrude Stein, the modernist poet who was the first to patronise this particular phase’, as well as ‘the purely abstract paintings of still-life for which he is now chiefly known’.<sup>38</sup> The article is complemented by a full-page black-and-white reproduction of a Picasso etching from a series on mother and child, or *Mère et Enfant*, here titled ‘La Maternité’ (1922).<sup>39</sup> Each of Nevinson’s articles, except the last in the series, was likewise accompanied by images of modernist art work. Together his essays supply a concise history of modernist art, which oscillates between an instructive and an informal, intimate stance. Nevinson’s history is scattered with gossipy portraits that parallel the tone of the magazine’s celebrity pages. Amedeo Modigliani is ‘a quiet, charming-mannered Italian’ whom Nevinson ‘knew [...] as well as, if not better than, most men’.<sup>40</sup> Of the Dutch-French Fauvist Kees van

Dongen, we are told: ‘His parties are wonderful. He, though host, often does not attend them. “All Paris” does, though’.<sup>41</sup> Nevinson’s articles enable readers of *Harper’s Bazaar* to enhance their sophistication by increasing their understanding of modernist art and gaining insider knowledge of the character and lifestyle of its famous personalities.

Nevinson’s essay series also functions as an act of self-promotion, which *Harper’s Bazaar* facilitates in order to trade on Nevinson’s celebrity. Christopher Martin describes Nevinson’s rapid rise to fame after successful exhibitions of his war paintings in 1916 and 1918, which was aided by the existing celebrity of his parents, the British war correspondent Henry Woodd Nevinson and suffragist Margaret Wynne Nevinson, and Nevinson’s contact with writers who visited his exhibitions and bought his paintings, such as George Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad, and H. G. Wells, and those, such as Edith Sitwell, who subsequently sat for portraits. ‘Highly visible through press attention and frequenting such fashionable venues as the Café Royal’ in the late 1910s and early 1920s, Martin notes, ‘the artist himself became iconic’.<sup>42</sup> By the end of the 1920s, however, as Richard Ingleby details, Nevinson ‘had swapped the tables of the Café Royal for the leather-bound armchairs of the Savage Club and, for all his talk of being the outsider, he was looking to all intents and purposes like a settled member of the establishment’.<sup>43</sup> Nevinson’s contributions to *Harper’s Bazaar*, along with his wider efforts to forge a career as a journalist and writer in the 1930s, can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain this celebrity and his relevance to contemporary culture. ‘Some sixteen or seventeen years ago I wrote with my friend F. T. Marinetti in an Italian Futurist manifesto that “Immortality in art is a disgrace”’, Nevinson records in ‘The Italian Moderns’ (March 1931), before crediting the Italian Futurists, and thus, by implication, himself, with starting the ‘entire change of intellectual standards’ that has subsequently characterised the rise of modern art in Europe.<sup>44</sup> In ‘Outstanding Artists in England To-day’ (July 1930), he claims to have been ‘one of the founders in Paris of Cubism’ and ‘the first

man to bring these works over to England'. 'Picasso has said of me that I am an important English painter because my work possesses *élan*, a quality which he says is rare', Nevinson asserts, evoking Henri Bergson's influential notion of *élan vital*, the intuitive, creative impetus that drives the evolution of all living beings according to Bergson in *Creative Evolution* (1907).<sup>45</sup> Picasso's ambiguous term is not explained, but its French origin implicitly suggests sophistication. Nevinson presents himself as a central figure in the development of modernist art, while his discussion equips *Harper's Bazaar's* readers with knowledge and terminology to help them comprehend or at least bluff on the topic. This exchange is typical of the complex symbiotic relationship between the magazine and modernism. The publication of modernist content in this glossy fashion magazine was beneficial both for modernists seeking to maintain their celebrity, and for *Harper's Bazaar* (UK), which sought to attract, cultivate, and sustain a sophisticated readership.

### **Parody, Promotion, and Exclusivity**

Surveying modernism from the perspective of the early 1930s, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) frequently looked back on modernism's past to review and consolidate its legacy in the present. Such accounts were not always celebratory in approach. Indeed, D. B. Wyndham Lewis's 'From a Paris Note Book', published in *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) in September 1931, ridicules nostalgic narratives of modernism's origins of the type found in Nevinson's essay series and growing in popularity at this time. Lewis was a renowned wit and popular satirical columnist, who 'suffered with good humour the misfortune of sharing his name with Percy Wyndham Lewis' and wrote successful columns for mass-market newspapers the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* as well as contributing to a broad range of periodicals, including society magazine *The Tatler* from 1933.<sup>46</sup> In the 1930s, Lewis contributed a number of humorous sketches and articles to *Harper's Bazaar*. 'From a Paris Note Book' is a pseudo

travel journal, framed by Lewis as extracts from ‘one or two notebooks I kept when I lived in Paris’, which he imagines might produce ‘a badly-needed book on Paris’ that will be:

not an ordinary guide, nor one of those intimate charming books on restaurants and theatres and Lalique glass and James Joyce and the Salon des Indépendants and Chanel and Marie Laurencin and bookstalls and Gallo-Roman remains and Gertrude Stein and Cocteau and so forth.<sup>47</sup>

The article is presented as an antidote to travel books and early memoirs depicting Paris as a bustling hub of cosmopolitanism, haute couture, high culture, and modernism, though in fact its satirical anecdotes repeatedly reinforce this reputation. Despite parodying modernist experimentalism and nostalgic accounts of its Paris origins, ‘From a Paris Note Book’ nonetheless contributes to the promotion of modernism by emphasising its exclusivity and high cultural status.

Lewis’s article pokes fun at modernism’s aesthetic strategies and elitist publishing practices by including a spoof text purportedly written by ‘Miss Gertrude Stein’ and ‘printed on handmade *papier du Japon*, in a limited edition, one volume, 20 by 26 *hors commerce*, each copy numbered and signed, and issued to subscribers only’. His parody evokes the concision, repetition, and mischievous wordplay of Stein’s infamously difficult modernist writing:

As to places.

Places as to.

Clocks and lilac and

Camembert and El Greco



and old striped trousers.

Next.

How next.

Next as to.

As seen a scene. So

seen, seen so much as.

Right.

Left right left right left.

No decision. For instance.

And Picasso had the.

Had the.

If.

Thank you very much thank you

very.

The nonsensical content of these lines, ‘issued [as] an important message’, undermines the value allegedly ascribed to them by Stein and generated through the production of limited-edition volumes.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, however, Lewis confirms Stein’s highbrow status by reinforcing her reputation as a central figure of the Parisian avant-garde and leading experimental writer. Karen Leick has traced the role played by such parodies in generating Stein’s celebrity in the mainstream American press of the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>49</sup> ‘So omnipresent and captivating were these kinds of parodic interpretations that modernism became inextricably understood through them’, as Leonard Diepeveen notes in his anthology of *Mock Modernism*.<sup>50</sup> As Hammill observes of *Vanity Fair*, parodies of modernist writers ‘interpellate an audience already familiar with avant-garde texts, flattering readers by

implying that they are too sophisticated to be intimidated by experimental writing, but that they can also recognize the *over*-sophistication (speciousness, obscurity) of certain highbrow postures'.<sup>51</sup> Readers of 'From a Paris Note Book' in *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) are similarly invited to demonstrate their sophisticated stance on modernist culture by regarding Stein with an ironic, critical eye.

While Lewis's article highlights the difficulty, obscurity, and potential over-sophistication of Stein's experimentalism, however, the same issue of *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) conversely promotes Stein's writing and makes it available to readers by publishing her short fiction 'Left to Right'. This text was the first by Stein to appear in *Harper's Bazaar* (UK), which printed her writing in five subsequent issues during 1931-35, including serialising *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in June, July, and August 1933. As Stein would later recall in the *Autobiography*, 'Left to Right' fictionalises her break with the French surrealist Georges Hugnet and his circle after she 'offered to translate' his poem *Enfances* 'but instead [...] wrote a poem about it', which 'at first pleased Georges Hugnet too much and then did not please him at all'. Stein's poem became *Before the Flowers of Friendship Faded Friendship Faded* (1931), and, as the *Autobiography* recounts, after '[e]verybody mixed themselves up in all this', she 'consoled herself by telling all about it in a delightful story [...] which was printed in the London Harper's Bazaar'.<sup>52</sup> The details of these events and their players are buried in Stein's story, which plainly depicts a quarrel over a book but does not indicate its content. The text repeatedly refers to 'everybody talking' about 'everything' without precisely identifying what 'everything' signifies. As Ulla Dydo notes, the text is 'made up of main clauses whose subjects, "I," "he," "they," "one," "everyone," are all totally depersonalized'.<sup>53</sup> Hugnet appears as 'Arthur William' and the composer Virgil Thomson as 'Generale Erving', who is introduced as 'a writer, that is to say he had written not writing but something'. Yet, the elusiveness of Stein's fast-paced, sparsely-punctuated prose

paradoxically creates an illusion of accessibility by mimicking the intimate, informal tone of one confiding in a friend and assuming the details of the matter are already known between them. ‘Generale Erving told me over the telephone that he wanted to fix up everything’, the narrator reports at breakneck speed: ‘It was alright but it would be alright and Arthur was not at all there but he Generale Erving would see him was I willing’.<sup>54</sup> The reader is drawn into a gossipy tête-à-tête by Stein’s story, which playfully evokes the tone of confidentiality and familiarity affected by the gossip and frequently used by celebrity and fashion columnists to suggest the exclusivity of their reports on the activities of famous people and the latest trends in dress. *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) promotes the reception of ‘Left to Right’ as a modernist experiment in gossip by heading the text with the two-line caption ‘Everybody / Knows all about this Thing . . .’, though the exact meaning of ‘this Thing’ – and the subject of the story – remains unclear.<sup>55</sup>

Within the same September 1931 issue, then, *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) fosters two contradictory yet complementary perspectives on Stein and modernism in order to facilitate its construction of a sophisticated audience. Lewis’s sketch satirises her writing’s difficulty and inaccessibility, but frames the reader as sophisticated enough to regard with wry, knowing amusement rather than awe modernism’s experimental aesthetic practices and exclusive publishing methods. The publication of ‘Left to Right’ in *Harper’s Bazaar* (UK) simultaneously promotes and commodifies Stein’s writing, making it available to the magazine’s readers and enabling an enhanced cultural sophistication through direct contact with a high modernist author. Lewis’s ‘From a Paris Note Book’, like Nevinson’s nostalgic essay series, looks back on modernism’s origins to consolidate Stein’s significance to the Parisian avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s, while the billing of ‘Left to Right’ as ‘A Study in the New Manner by Gertrude Stein’ confirms her relevance to the present.<sup>56</sup> The two features work in tandem, despite apparent contradictions in outlook, to promote Stein’s

writing and bolster her reputation as an important contemporary writer. Early *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) again does not passively accommodate modernist content, but actively shapes its reception. By insisting on the relevance, exclusivity, and high cultural value of the modernist writers, artists, and outputs it printed and debated in its early years, the magazine increased its own cultural value. When viewed in this context, the publication of Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* here no longer appears a serendipitous anomaly, as it has presumably appeared to Stein scholars who have left this publication venue unexplored, but rather accords with the magazine's broader attempts to exploit modernism's cultural capital.

## **Conclusion**

In its early years, *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) made knowledge of modernism – its origins, practitioners, aesthetic methods, and outputs – a valuable signifier of intellectual and cultural sophistication. Though it commodified and made high modernism available to new readers, it resisted presenting modernism as popular or mainstream. To return to the quotation with which this article opened, the perception of an 'effervescent', 'user-friendly' modernism that emerges from recent revisionist scholarship on modernism's interactions with mass markets and popular culture can be misleading.<sup>57</sup> While elite fashion magazines like British *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* did allow modernists to address a wider public and fuel their celebrity, those publics did not necessarily facilitate the reception of modernism as user-friendly. Indeed, as this article has demonstrated, modernism's difficulty, inaccessibility, and exclusivity were as important as its modernity and effervescence for the construction of the sophisticated public of *Harper's Bazaar* (UK). Following the elitist logic of fashion, this magazine desired distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow, good taste and bad taste, extraordinary and ordinary, even as it continually revised and troubled the meaning of those categories.

In contemporary critical discussions of modernism's widening publics in the 1920s and 1930s the terms 'fashionable' and 'popular' can appear to be interchangeable, yet analysing modernism's treatment in *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) during 1929-35 reminds us that the two words do not signify the same thing. Leick has posited that the production of bestsellers by Joyce, Woolf, and Stein in the United States in a six month period (1933-34) 'is evidence of the remarkable mainstreaming of modernism': 'As 1922 is considered a seminal year for modernism with the publication of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, 1933-34 can be recognized as the moment that modernist writers became truly popular'.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, this mainstreaming of modernism, in which *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) participated through serialising Stein's bestselling text before it achieved that bestselling status, appears to have had an adverse effect on modernism's value to the magazine as a tool for attracting and cultivating a sophisticated public. Though texts by modernist writers continued to appear sporadically in *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) through the late 1930s, there was a marked decline in its attention to modernist art and literature after 1934. In other words, the moment at which modernism became 'truly popular' was also the moment at which it ceased to be exclusive and hence fashionable within this elite, fashion magazine.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Laura Frost, *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Garrity, 'Selling Culture to the "Civilized": Bloomsbury, British *Vogue*, and the Marketing of National Identity', *Modernism/Modernity*, 6: 2 (1999): 29-58, (p. 33); Faye Hammill, *Sophistication: A Literary and Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 155.

<sup>3</sup> Frost, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Aurelea Mahood, 'Fashioning Readers: the avant garde and British *Vogue*, 1920-29', *Women: A Cultural Review* 13: 1 (2002): 37-47, (p. 46).

<sup>6</sup> Hammill, *Sophistication*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> Garrity, p. 32.

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- <sup>9</sup> Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Nicola Luckhurst, *Bloomsbury in Vogue* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1998), p. 13, p. 8.
- <sup>11</sup> Garrity, p. 30.
- <sup>12</sup> Faye Hammill, 'In Good Company: Modernism, Celebrity, and Sophistication in *Vanity Fair*', *Modernist Star Maps: Celebrity, Modernity, Culture*, edited by Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 123-35, (p. 135).
- <sup>13</sup> A. Quinn, 'Women's Magazines – Sales Figures, 1938-59', *Magforum* (2012) <[http://www.magforum.com/glossies/womens\\_magazine\\_sales.htm](http://www.magforum.com/glossies/womens_magazine_sales.htm)> [accessed 29 July 2015].
- <sup>14</sup> On *Harper's Bazaar* (UK) as a middlebrow text, see my essay 'Modernism and the Middlebrow in British Women's Magazines, 1916-30', in *Middlebrow and Gender, 1890-1945*, ed. Christoph Ehland and Cornelia Wächter (Brill: 2015). For discussion of the middlebrow and the rise of middlebrow studies, see Faye Hammill, *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture between the Wars* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007); Chapter 3 of Hammill's *Sophistication*; and *Modernist Cultures*, 6: 1 (2011), special issue on 'The Middlebrow- Within or Without Modernism', edited by Melissa Sullivan and Sophie Blanch.
- <sup>15</sup> Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (London: Heinemann, 1983), p. 9.
- <sup>16</sup> George Simmel, 'Fashion' [1904], *The American Journal of Sociology* 62: 6 (May, 1957): 541-558, (p. 544).
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 545.
- <sup>18</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [1979], trans. Richard Nice (London: New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 468-9.
- <sup>19</sup> Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (University of Illinois Press, 1964), pp. 206-7.
- <sup>20</sup> Mike Ashley, *The Age of the Storytellers: British Popular Fiction Magazines, 1880-1950* (London: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2006), p. 272.
- <sup>21</sup> J. B. Priestley, signed endorsement printed on inside cover of *Harper's Bazaar*, October 1930.
- <sup>22</sup> *Vanity Fair* (London: National Magazines Company, 1914-1929) was the descendent of the long-running weekly *Vanity Fair: A Weekly Show of Political, Social and Literary Wares*, founded by Thomas Gibson Bowles in 1868 and purchased by the National Magazine Company in 1914.
- <sup>23</sup> R. H. Wilenski, 'The New Sculpture Rediscovered Free Thought', *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1930, p. 70.
- <sup>24</sup> TC
- <sup>25</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 693-702.
- <sup>26</sup> Carmen Ellis, 'Pretty Little Nothings', *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1930, p. 11.
- <sup>27</sup> Nika Dittman, 'Italy', *Harper's Bazaar*, December 1934, p. 60.
- <sup>28</sup> Bourdieu, p. 82.
- <sup>29</sup> Hammill, *Sophistication*, p. 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Althusser, p. 699.
- <sup>31</sup> B. J. Kirkpatrick records this text's publication in *Harper's Magazine* under the alternative title 'The Lady in the Looking Glass: A Reflection' in *A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), p. 171.
- <sup>32</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'In the Looking Glass', *Harper's Bazaar*, January 1930, p. 43, p. 98.

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- <sup>33</sup> Editorial billing of Woolf, 'In the Looking Glass', *Harper's Bazaar*, January 1930, p. 5, p. 43.
- <sup>34</sup> Quoted in Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin, ed., *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 258.
- <sup>35</sup> Woolf, p. 98.
- <sup>36</sup> Editorial billing, 'Outstanding Artists in England To-day', *Harper's Bazaar*, July 1930, p. 46.
- <sup>37</sup> C. R. W. Nevinston, 'Outstanding Artists in France To-day', *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1930, p. 72.
- <sup>38</sup> C. R. W. Nevinston, 'Outstanding Artists in Spain To-day', *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1930, pp. 65, 95.
- <sup>39</sup> Pablo Picasso, 'La Maternité', *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1930, p. 64.
- <sup>40</sup> C. R. W. Nevinston, 'The Italian Moderns', *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1931, p. 67.
- <sup>41</sup> C. R. W. Nevinston, 'The Sur-Realists', *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1931, p. 78.
- <sup>42</sup> Christopher Martin, 'C. R. W. Nevinston and Fiction: A Survey', in *A Dilemma of English Modernism: Visual and Verbal Politics in the Life and Work of C. R. W. Nevinston (1889-1946)*, ed. Michael J. K. Walsh (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp 100-114, (p. 100).
- <sup>43</sup> Richard Ingleby, 'Utterly Tired of Chaos: The Life of C. R. W. Nevinston', in *C. R. W. Nevinston: The Twentieth Century* (London: Merrell Holberton in association with the Imperial War Museum, 1999), pp. 9-25, (pp. 22-23).
- <sup>44</sup> Nevinston, 'The Italian Moderns', p. 67.
- <sup>45</sup> Nevinston, 'Outstanding Artists in England', p. 93.
- <sup>46</sup> Godfrey Smith, 'Lewis, (Dominic) Bevan Wyndham (1891-1969)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37671>, accessed 1 Sept 2015].
- <sup>47</sup> D. B. Wyndham Lewis, 'From a Paris Note Book', *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1931, p. 30.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 31.
- <sup>49</sup> See Karen Leick, *Gertrude Stein: The Making of an American Celebrity* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- <sup>50</sup> Leonard Diepeveen, *Mock Modernism: An Anthology of Parodies, Travesties, Frauds, 1910-1935* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 4.
- <sup>51</sup> Hammill, *Sophistication*, pp. 159-60.
- <sup>52</sup> Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 249-50.
- <sup>53</sup> Ulla Dydo (with William Rice), *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises, 1923-1934* (Northwestern UP, 2003), p. 321.
- <sup>54</sup> Gertrude Stein, 'Left to Right', *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1931, p. 41.
- <sup>55</sup> Editorial caption above Stein, 'Left to Right', p. 41.
- <sup>56</sup> Editorial caption above Stein, 'Left to Right', p. 41.
- <sup>57</sup> Frost, p. 4.
- <sup>58</sup> Leick, p. 2.